

Add Seymour, Jr.  
Sunday, May 16, 2010

**Atlanta, GA** – Carl and Brenda Neely were like other parents and family members gathered on the Century Campus for the College's 126th Commencement – emotional, beaming with pride and full of stories about their member of the class of 2010.

"I am so excited. This is an honor for us and for our son," said Carl Neely about his son, salutatorian Christopher Neely '10 of Stone Mountain, Ga. "He's served the community, he goes feed the homeless every Sunday morning; he brought back his experiences from NASA where he did internships and brought them back to Atlanta to teach the kids. He was always excited about life. You could just tell that he was going to be an outstanding kid – because we raised him that way."

It was a popular sentiment on a comfortably warm day when approximately 514 men of Morehouse became the latest group to become Morehouse Men in front of more than 10,000 people.

In his keynote address, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates told the graduates that it is time for them to follow in the footsteps of Morehouse luminaries such as Martin Luther King Jr. '48, former president Benjamin E. Mays and Samuel Dubois Cook '48 and help ensure that all men are treated equally.

"No doubt ours is an imperfect nation," he said. "It has been and always will be a work in progress. So it falls to your generation to make sure we continue along that path of progress. As President Obama has said, you must put your foot firmly into the current of history."

Valedictorian Jimmie Strong '10, a native of Memphis, Tenn., told his classmates that it was time for them to heed that call.

“We know that the world awaits our service and our influence,” he said. “We also go with a solemn promise to all of you that we will pay forward for the priceless upbringings, unforgettable teachings and the urgings that crowned every step of our way. When the world makes the request...God send us men, the class of 2010 will step forward and say here we are.”

Gates and U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop Jr. were conferred the honorary Doctor of Laws while Tuskegee President Benjamin Payton, who is retiring after 27 years in office, received the honorary Doctor of Humane Letters.

President Emeritus Walter E. Massey '58 was presented the first-ever Presidential Renaissance Medallion.

Massey, the recently retired board chair for Bank of America, said the award was the highest honor he has ever received as it came from his alma mater. Massey was president when the class of 2010 enrolled at Morehouse as freshmen.

Among the seniors was the first graduating class of the John H. Hopps Jr. Research Scholars Program. The program, funded by the U.S. Department of Defense, provides tuition for students pursuing careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. It is named in honor of John H. Hopps Jr. '58, the former provost and senior vice president for Academic Affairs and former Deputy Undersecretary for the Defense Department.

The program's goal is to increase the number of Morehouse students pursuing graduate degrees in the sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Students participate in a highly structured program that includes research-based mentoring with faculty, seminars, courses, and other social and extracurricular activities.

Hopps' widow, June, was in attendance for the occasion.

“I know that recipients of this prestigious distinction will make a valuable contribution to our nation in the years to come,” Gates said.

President Robert M. Franklin '75 urged the class – who were freshmen when Franklin began his tenure as president – to lead by example.

“Be disturbed by mediocrity,” he said. “Do not sleep well in the presence of injustice. You must raise the social justice question if no one else at the table raises it. Be true to Morehouse.”

After Commencement, members of the class of 2010 are headed off to a wide variety of careers and educational opportunities. For example, Desmond Coble '10 is going to Japan to serve in the U.S. Navy while Derrick Brown '10 will attend Emory University's Candler School of Theology to earn a master's in divinity. Ryan Bates '10 will work in New York for global financial giant, J.P. Morgan.

Neely is already working as a field engineer for Exxon Mobile Pipeline Company in Houston, Texas.

Strong will spend a year working for the International Trade and Finance Division of the Library of Congress' Congressional Research Service before heading to Harvard Law School in 2011.

But as the class of 2010 goes their separate ways, U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop '68 urged them to embrace the legacy of the Morehouse Man.

“You are expected to succeed,” he said in his charge to the graduates. “You must develop our boys into strong responsible men, just as Morehouse has helped to develop you. The torch is now passed. It is now in your hands. Go forth with God's blessings and wear the name well.”